

# THE FUNDING OF PRISON EDUCATION

## PROGRAMS: AN APPROACH

*By Michael J. Catillaz and Joseph A. Russo*

It is no news that this country's penal institutions have failed to demonstrate any substantial effectiveness in deterring criminals from further acts which are accompanied by a return ticket to incarceration. The literature of penology has, for several years, called for prison reform on a massive scale. Within the past decade we have seen the institutions which house this country's incarcerated population attempt to replace the traditional penal image with one that emphasizes correction and a positive change in the individual. Part of this new approach has been the changing of names and titles, but a larger part has been in the area of prison programming. Along with more expanded, innovative vocational programs has come the advent of the college classroom in our correctional facilities.

It is also no secret that colleges are more than eager to aid prison administrators in upgrading the opportunities offered to inmates. Enrollment problems on campuses have forced educators to seek out different groups of individuals not traditionally served by institutions of higher learning. One of the foremost recommendations by groups such as the Carnegie Commission is to extend educational opportunities over prison walls. Many four-year schools and community colleges alike have found this proposal most appealing, not only for its humanitarian qualities, but also for its financial implications in times of budgetary nightmares. The time is ripe for this marriage. The correctional image is clearly trying to move away from "security" and toward "rehabilitation" while educators are very ready to answer these needs.



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At present there seems to be no one particular model that is readily applicable to a prison and its nearby college. Rather, any arrangement which places inmates in a college classroom seems to have developed strictly on the basis of the characteristics of the situation at hand. At this time many prison college programs are actually sponsored by colleges, but many are also under the direction of correctional facilities and simply employ available faculty from a nearby college to "moonlight" in their prison classrooms. For the inmate this fails to represent a total college experience, in addition to being questionable in terms of practical benefits for the inmate upon release. Just as a Prison Superintendent would argue that a Dean of Students should not be responsible for prison security, so it should follow that correctional personnel are not the most effective educators. Directors of college prison programs should be professional educators, for educating is what they do best; and programs, ideally, should be *like colleges*. The teaching of college level courses without approved degree programs and all the supportive services characteristic of a college, offers little to the inmate-student in terms of potential implementation of his acquired skills. Courses offered should be part of curricula recognized by appropriate college accreditation associations and all student services should be available to the inmate-student. His needs for these supportive experiences are far more acute than that of the traditional student, by virtue of his background and his present situation. Because he more commonly does not know what college is about, he would be more apt to fail in a college outside prison, even though he may succeed inside the classroom.

It is essential that the inmate-student becomes aware of each and every alternative available to him throughout the educational process. The inmate-student should experience all the responsibilities of being a college student.

The present funding methods of inmate education programs also appear in different forms. Departments of Corrections support their own programs, but only to an extent proportional to the importance of the college program within the institutional programming structure. Usually, under these circumstances, only a small segment of the inmate population would be enrolled, and the development and success of the program itself is dependent upon availability of correctional programming monies. Other programs are funded by federal and state grants. Although this affords greater flexibility with the college program, it remains a rather temporary arrangement since a program's future usually depends on an annual renewal of funding. This fly-by-night method is not likely to promote growth over an extended period of time.

Regardless of the funding source, if a prison college program is limited financially, upper division classes, placement and transfer counseling, record keeping, proper planning and other important parts of a sound program can never be a reality. A source of funding is needed which allows the college experience for the inmate to replicate as closely as possible the same experience on campuses beyond the prison walls. This end can, in fact, be rendered feasible by means of student financial aid programs.

Funding through Financial Aid programs allows for normal program development to take place in addition to insuring the equal opportunity for admission for all applicants. As for any student, need analysis will usually result in an award for the individual who is legitimately unable to meet college costs from personal funds. The process of inmates coming to understand the concepts of student financial aid is also consistent with the philosophy that they should become familiar with all aspects of the college experience.

Anyone who has attempted to travel the road described above has found it is easier said than done. The union of an institution of higher education and an institution of correction is fraught with difficulty. Educators are not at all used to dealing with the unusual circumstances of the inmate-student and Financial Aid administration is no exception. Aid programs were designed with the traditional student in mind and not the incarcerated student. For example, on few financial aid applications can an applicant indicate that he is incarcerated. Due to the nature of the inmate's situation, student loans and self-help are inappropriate. A Work-Study position is somewhat impractical given the present duties each inmate performs within the prison. Fortunately, most inmate-applicants are eligible for enough gift assistance to meet their college costs. It is important to remember that an inmate's budget will only include the costs of tuition, books and possibly fees. Room, board and personal expenses are met through the facility. While an on-campus student in a public institution might require \$3,000 for an academic year, the incarcerated student's budget might be less than \$1,000 at that same college.

When dealing with any state or federal agency in relation to an inmate's aid application, special provisions may prove invaluable in coordinating the funding concerns of groups of individuals. Whereas under normal circumstances a zero in every box of an application leaves many unanswered questions, a cover letter from the appropriate financial aid officer noting the incarcerated status of the applicant greatly expedites the entire process by explaining the numerous zeros.

The federal government's Basic Educational Opportunity Grant is considered by knowledgeable aid officers to be the primary aid program for future years. Because of their rather unique circumstances, most inmate-applicants are able to attain partial funding through this program. Nearly all are citizens of the United States. Because of their incarcerated status, only those recently admitted to the facility have had an opportunity to earn any substantial income during the previous calendar year. Those recently incarcerated for more than 10 consecutive weeks would normally qualify for use of the supplement in the BEOG application process. In addition, most inmates meet the qualifications for exclusion of parental income.

Regardless of the costs incurred by a student, his BEOG award may not exceed one-half of his total annual college budget. In other words, even if an applicant is eligible, we have solved only half of the problem. If the applicant is eligible for Veterans Administration Educational Benefits or fund-

ing through a state aid program, the remaining one-half of the budget can normally be met. Usually an inmate will meet the eligibility requirements for an Education Opportunity Program by virtue of his financial status and typically poor educational background.

An important factor in many financial aid programs is the marital status of the applicant. Although in many circumstances incarceration immediately implies separation for those inmates who are married, technically this is *not* the case concerning the BEOG application process. If an applicant is legally married, he must report this information regardless of his incarceration. An estimate of spouse's income, whether taxable or non-taxable, for the previous calendar year *must* be reported on married inmates' applications. In addition, the appropriate number of dependents must be stated.

Questions may arise when the implementation of a state program in conjunction with a BEOG award has resulted in a *duplication* of resources in meeting an inmate's financial needs. A precedent regarding this point has been set where the BEOG "comes first" and the other aid program, regardless of its nature, complemented the remaining one-half of the budget not to exceed the financial need of the student. Although an inmate receiving a maximum BEOG index on his Student Eligibility Report only receives a maximum award of one-half of his budget, the obligations of the program have been administered since financial need has been met regardless of the figures involved. (\$200 - \$1400 award limits accepted.)

When dealing with agencies where it is desirable to mail all of the applications with an explanation of the special circumstances attached, it may also prove beneficial to devise a method of accurately recording the individual award statements as they are returned from the various funding agencies. Student Eligibility Reports and other such reports being delivered throughout the facility may result in problems which could complicate an already complex process. If sufficient staffing were available, group handling of the application process would not be necessary but this is rarely the case.

As in every student's budget, the inmate budget has a \$150 allotment per year for books and supplies. Since correctional facilities rarely allow money to be exchanged by inmates, this money usually is transferred from the fiscal officer of the college to the bookstore manager for the textbooks delivered to an inmate-student. When the funding sources are entitlement programs, the balance of the cost of books and supplies is the property of the inmate by law and can serve the very useful purpose of paying for graduation fees, transcript fees or application fees to other colleges. Normally, prisons carry "inmate accounts" to and from which funds can be dealt with the inmate's knowledge. This seems to be an ideal arrangement where it can be worked out with the correctional administration.

Many prison education programs and their host colleges have come under close scrutiny by the community when news was received that convicted individuals were being granted an education. The financial aid officer is able to avoid any potential conflict with his community by implementing non-campus based programs in funding inmate-students. BEOG, VA, and similar state programs take eligibility decisions out of the on-campus office and to

the state capital and Washington. Usually, a recommendation to write an appropriate legislator is the best reply to a concerned citizen. Community public relations would seem to dictate minimal use of college based funds wherever possible.

To those faced with the unique task of prescribing a financial aid package for inmates, it is hoped that the above information will provide some assistance. The components of a package for inmates will vary according to the budget, student eligibility, the nature of the academic programs and the particular sanctions administered by the correctional facility. Our hope is to extend some experiences and ideas which might be helpful to others approaching this unusual task.

#### B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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